DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 153 698 JC 780 260

AUTHOR Bounds, Stuart M.
TITLE A Participative Procedure for Educational Master Planning.
PUB DATE May 78
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the 18th Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research, Houston, Texas, May 21-25, 1978

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Committees; Community Colleges; Community Study; Data Collection; *Educational Planning; *Junior Colleges; *Master Plans; Models; Objectives; *Participation; Planning Meetings; Student Participation; Teacher Participation
IDENTIFIERS Thomas Nelson Community College VA

ABSTRACT

A model procedure, implemented in 1976 at Thomas Nelson Community College (Virginia), for community based and continuous long-range planning is described in this report. The model involves extensive participation by all community segments and presents strategies for review, approval, and research in support of the plan. Planning components include reviewing the institution's legal basis and requirements such as federal environmental impact statements, affirmative action plans, safety requirements, state policies, and local ordinances; clearly articulating the planning philosophy; and systematically reviewing community college planning literature in order to generate a strategy paper. The data base necessary for planning includes information on the service area and the college in terms of demography, manpower and employment needs, public school enrollments and graduation projections, educational needs, and college history, philosophy and goals, educational programs and fiscal organization. Determination of long-range goals requires establishing committees for program, organization, and facilities assessments, and for reviewing planning assumptions. Procedures for review, approval, and evaluation of the master plan are discussed in terms of operation and effectiveness. (TE)

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A PARTICIPATIVE PROCEDURE FOR EDUCATIONAL MASTER PLANNING

by

Stuart M. Bounds, EdD
Director of Institutional Research
Thomas Nelson Community College
P. O. Box 9407
Hampton, Virginia 23670
804-826-4800

Paper presented to the Eighteenth Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Reserach in Houston, Texas on May 21-25, 1978

JC 780 860

ABSTRACT

The paper presents a model for master planning in community colleges which was implemented in 1976 at Thomas Nelson Community College. The model assumes that long range planning should be community based, continuous, and that it should be the result of extensive participation by all segments of the college community.

A model format was established after examining a broad sample of existing community college master plans. The model includes strategies for planning, for review and approval, as well as for research in support of the plan.

Application of the model yielded a functional plan with widespread commitment among the participants.

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FOREWORD

The planning procedure presented in this paper reflects essentially the process used at Thomas Nelson Community College in developing its ten-year master plan for the period 1976-86. While the responsibility for coordinating the master plan rested with the author, a good many individuals contributed their experience to the process.

Of particular importance was the contribution of Ms Christie Vernon, the Coordinator of Library Services at TNCC, who collaborated with the author at each stage of the planning process. Prior to the establishment of an Office of Institutuional Research at the college, Ms Vernon developed much of the groundwork for the master plan as a major research project in her doctoral program. Ms Vernon conducted a content analysis of existing master plans and developed an initial table of contents for the plan. She administered a Delphi survey to assess the goals of the various segments of the college community and inventoried existing educational programs in the service area. Together with the author, Ms Vernon conducted a survey of the adult population of the Peninsula and the evaluation of the planning process. Her advice and assistance throughout the project was most valuable.

Important contributions were also made by many members of the faculty and staff at the college as well as by the research staff in the Virginia Department of Community Colleges. It is the author's hope that the procedure can be improved as experience is gained in its application.

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1971, Thomas Nelson Community College adopted and published an Educational Master Plan which was subsequently approved by the State Board for Community Colleges for a five year period. It is the policy of the Virginia Community College System that all colleges in the system have an educational master plan and that the plan be approved both by the Local Board and the State Board for Community Colleges. In the winter of 1976, the college began planning for the revision of the long range plan. Responsibility for coordinating long range planning was delegated to the Office of Institutional Research.

Although state policy contains few requirements as to the content of the master plan, it does call for a Master Site Plan, which details the location, size and use of all existing and planned buildings or facilities and their relationship to one another. In support of the Master Site Plan, the Educational Master Plan should contain the educational specifications for the use of future facilities, describe the actual space requirements, and establish priorities among the facilities for a ten-year planning period.

Beyond the requirements for educational master planning in state policy, the college must submit a six year financial plan as part of the biennial budget process. In addition, the college is required to plan for educational programs by submitting letters of intent to the Council for Higher Education in Virginia well in advance of program approval by that agency. These new program requests must contain data from the service area to justify the need for the program.

In an effort to bring together all of these planning elements into one consistent framework, the college decided that rather than simply

revise the existing master plan, a new comprehensive planning document should be developed. It was further decided that master planning should be a continuous process which results in a flexible and meaningful document that can be utilized in day-to-day decision-making at the college.

Another major consideration was that an educational master plan for a comprehensive community college ought to reflect the educational needs and aspirations of the community it serves. In this respect the planning process should be open to all segments of the college's service area as well as to the staff and students at the college. More importantly, it was assumed that planners have an obligation to seek out community needs and to strongly encourage community participation.

The planning procedure which follows is based on the process followed at Thomas Nelson Community College in developing its ten-year Master Plan between January and December of 1976. All of the above mentioned assumptions, as well as the requirements of state policy, are reflected in the procedure. Most important among these was the assumption that a long range plan for a community college should be the product of extensive participation by all constituencies in the college community.

II. THE PROCEDURE

Master Plan Components

Perhaps the most important task in developing a long range plan for a community college is to establish a format for the plan which meets the requirements of state or local policy and which accurately reflects the planning philosophy of top management and the governing board. The format should also provide for the "community base" in the planning process.

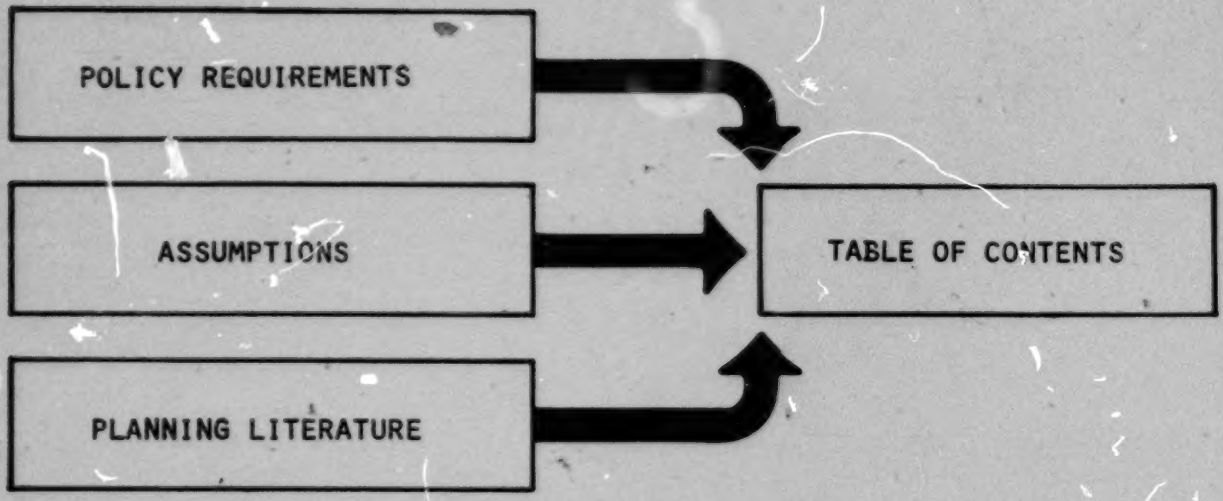
A careful review of the legal basis for the institution and the legal requirements for long range planning will establish the essential elements in the plan. These legal requirements can range from Federal environmental impact statements, affirmative action plans, and safety requirements, to state policies requiring program approval, fiscal planning, and long range capital outlay plans, to local ordinances and planning requirements of the jurisdictions which make up the service area. To be functional, a long range plan must integrate these requirements.

Beyond the legal basis for the plan, top management must clearly articulate a planning philosophy. Whatever the ideal relationship might be between planning and management, the long range planning process must reflect the management style of the institution and the needs and aspirations of the management team. The participative planning procedure outlined here would have little chance of success in an institution with an authoritarian management style. Moreover, even if a plan were developed it would have little chance of implementation under such circumstances.

The planning staff can assist top management in establishing its planning philosophy through a systematic review of the community college planning literature. A strategy paper should be developed outlining

Figure 1

MASTER PLAN COMPONENTS



several possible alternatives. To some extent this process can be used to develop a "planning attitude" among top management and to broaden top management's perspective. In the end, top management will have to settle on a strategy that fits its needs. Once agreement is reached between top management and the planning staff on a philosophy and strategy, a tentative table of contents should be drafted.

The procedure presented here assumes, of course, that top management has settled on a participative planning strategy. It also assumes that long range planning is a legal or policy requirement for the college.

Master Plan Data Base

In this phase, descriptive data on the service area and the college, and projections of that data for the planning period, are assembled into profiles for those individuals responsible for drafting long range goals for the college. Much of the data is available from secondary sources such as the publications of state and local planning agencies and from the management information system at the college. However, up-to-date information on community and college needs will require additional research. Assembling the data base is typically the major responsibility of the Office of Institutional Research in the long range planning process.

Descriptive data on the service area can be obtained from a number of sources. A good place to begin is with the planning departments in the jurisdictions that make up the service area. A visit with each of the planning directors will yield a vast amount of data on each of the jurisdictions and will enable the college to better understand the needs of those jurisdictions from the standpoint of those who have primary responsibility for planning to meet those needs. More importantly, city and county

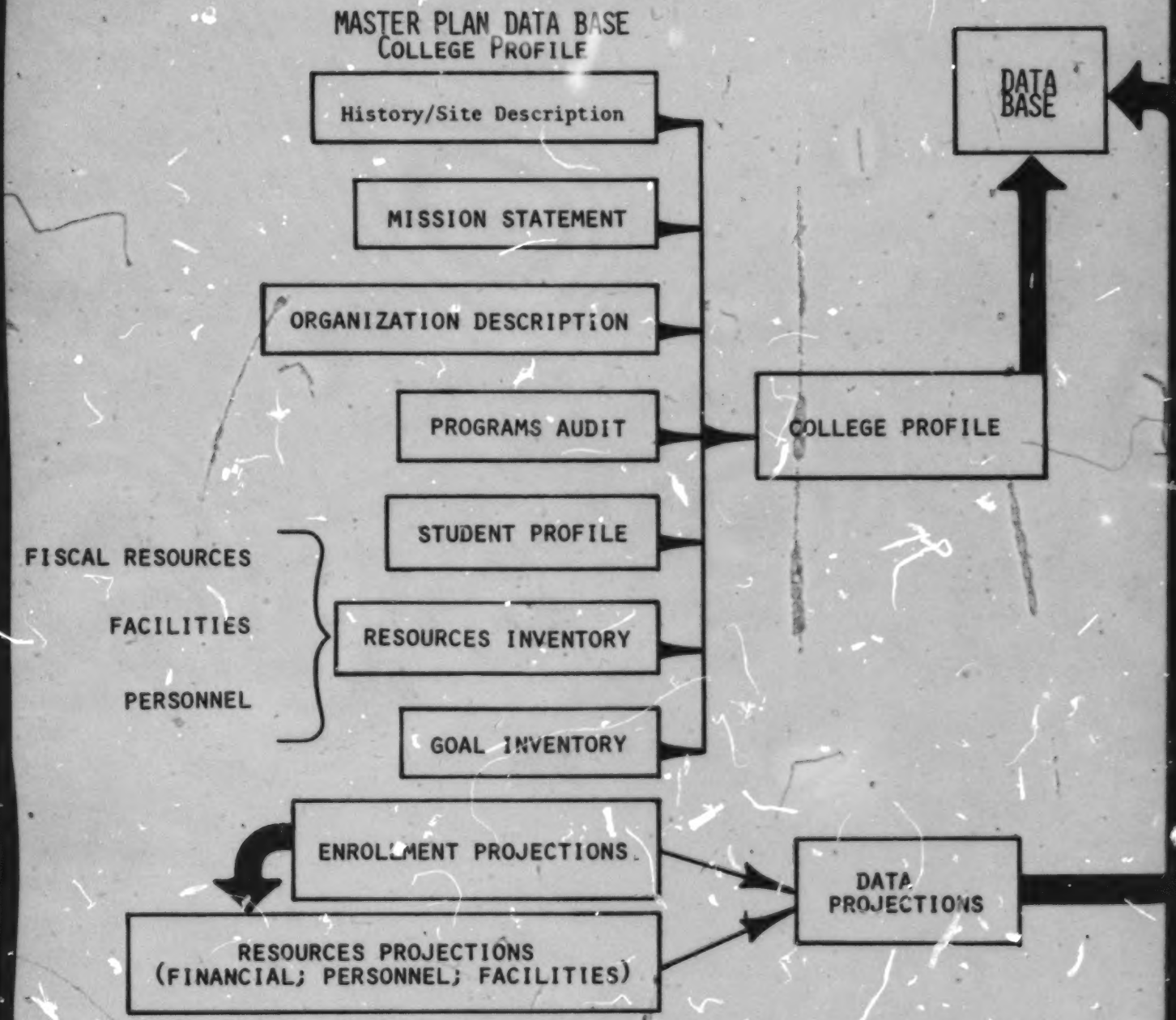
planners can probably provide the most reliable forecast of economic and social development in their respective jurisdictions.

While demographic data can easily be obtained from state and local agencies (this includes projections as well as historical data), manpower data is another matter. One should begin with an extensive review of the data published by the state employment agency and local agencies responsible for administering federal manpower grants. Generally, data on employment, employment by industry, and employment demand by occupational category (clerical, sales, professional, etc.) are available. Some employment demand data are available by occupational title although those data typically relate to only those individuals who are seeking employment, or seeking employees, through the state employment agency.

However, educational program planning requires more comprehensive manpower data for the service area, relating specifically to occupational titles. Also, colleges need to be able to project these data through the planning period. These data can be obtained through a comprehensive survey of employers in the service area. Such a survey should, at a minimum, solicit information on employment and projected employment for those occupational titles appropriate to a postsecondary program of two years or less. Even then, these data need to be interpreted very carefully since projecting occupational demand for five or ten years is difficult at best.

Data on public school enrollment, public school graduates, and post high school plans of public school graduates can generally be obtained from local school districts or from the state education agency. Projections of public school enrollment and graduates may be more difficult to obtain, particularly if the planning period is ten years. The best source is undoubtedly local school district headquarters. Public education data are

Figure 2


MASTER PLAN DATA BASE
COLLEGE PROFILE
History/Site Description
MISSION STATEMENT
ORGANIZATION DESCRIPTION
PROGRAMS AUDIT
STUDENT PROFILE
FISCAL RESOURCES
FACILITIES
PERSONNEL
RESOURCES INVENTORY
GOAL INVENTORY
ENROLLMENT PROJECTIONS
RESOURCES PROJECTIONS
(FINANCIAL; PERSONNEL; FACILITIES)
COLLEGE PROFILE
DATA BASE
DATA PROJECTIONS

important not only as indicators of future enrollment but also as a measure of the level of service the college is providing to the community.

Beyond these data on the service area, a community based planning process requires an assessment of the educational needs of the community. This assessment is typically done through a mail survey of a sample of the adult population, although a number of other approaches have been very successful (e.g., a telephone survey). That assessment should be supplemented by an inventory of existing educational programs in the service area. Together, these projects will enable the college to determine what community needs still need to be met.

Once the service area data base is assembled, data on the college need to be gathered into a concise format. It is generally useful to review the history of the college and to provide a site description, a mission statement, and an organizational chart to set the background for the data. The key element in the college profile is the student profile. This would include data on enrollment, demographic characteristics, socio-economic characteristics, graduation, and placement.

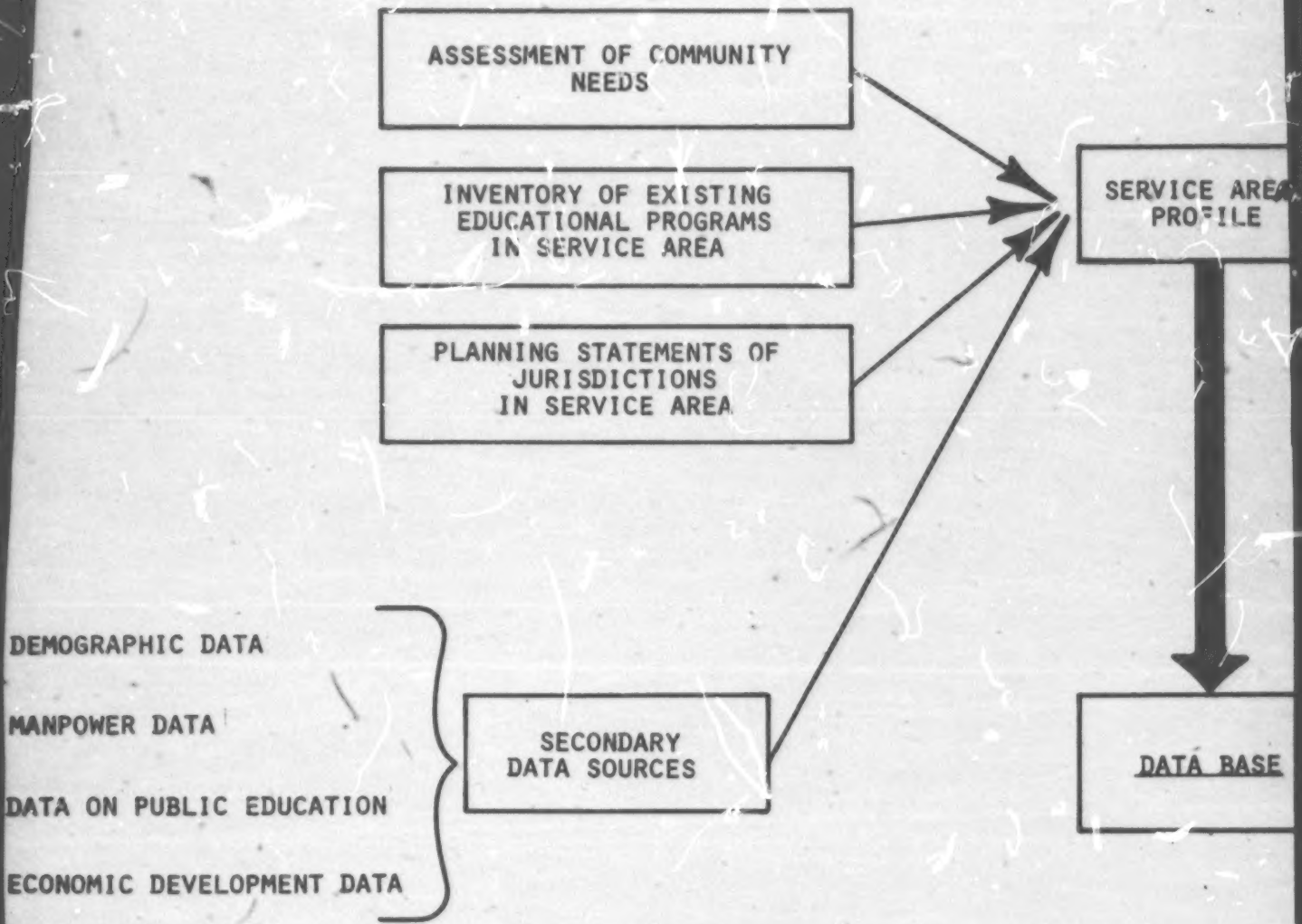
The student profile should be supplemented with a programs audit in which the enrollment, graduate and placement by program are analyzed over a number of years. Such an audit will highlight important trends among the programs which will prove useful in the goal setting process.

An historical inventory of institutional resources -- fiscal, facilities, and personnel -- is another important element in the planning data base. These data need to be matched against the programs audit and the student profile in the planning process in order to assess the sufficiency of those resources and in order to project future needs.

Figure 3

MASTER PLAN DATA BASE

SERVICE AREA PROFILE



One final inventory is necessary to complete the profile of the college -- an inventory of goals or needs, as perceived by the various segments of the college community. In setting long range goals, it is important to allow all those who have a stake in the plan (the students, staff, board, and community at large) to indicate their preferences and concerns about the future direction for the college. This can effectively be done through a Delphi survey technique or through a goals inventory such as the one developed by the Educational Testing Service. Another approach would be to bring all the segments of the college community together to hash out the goals, but this would more appropriately be included in the goal setting process rather than as an element in the data base.

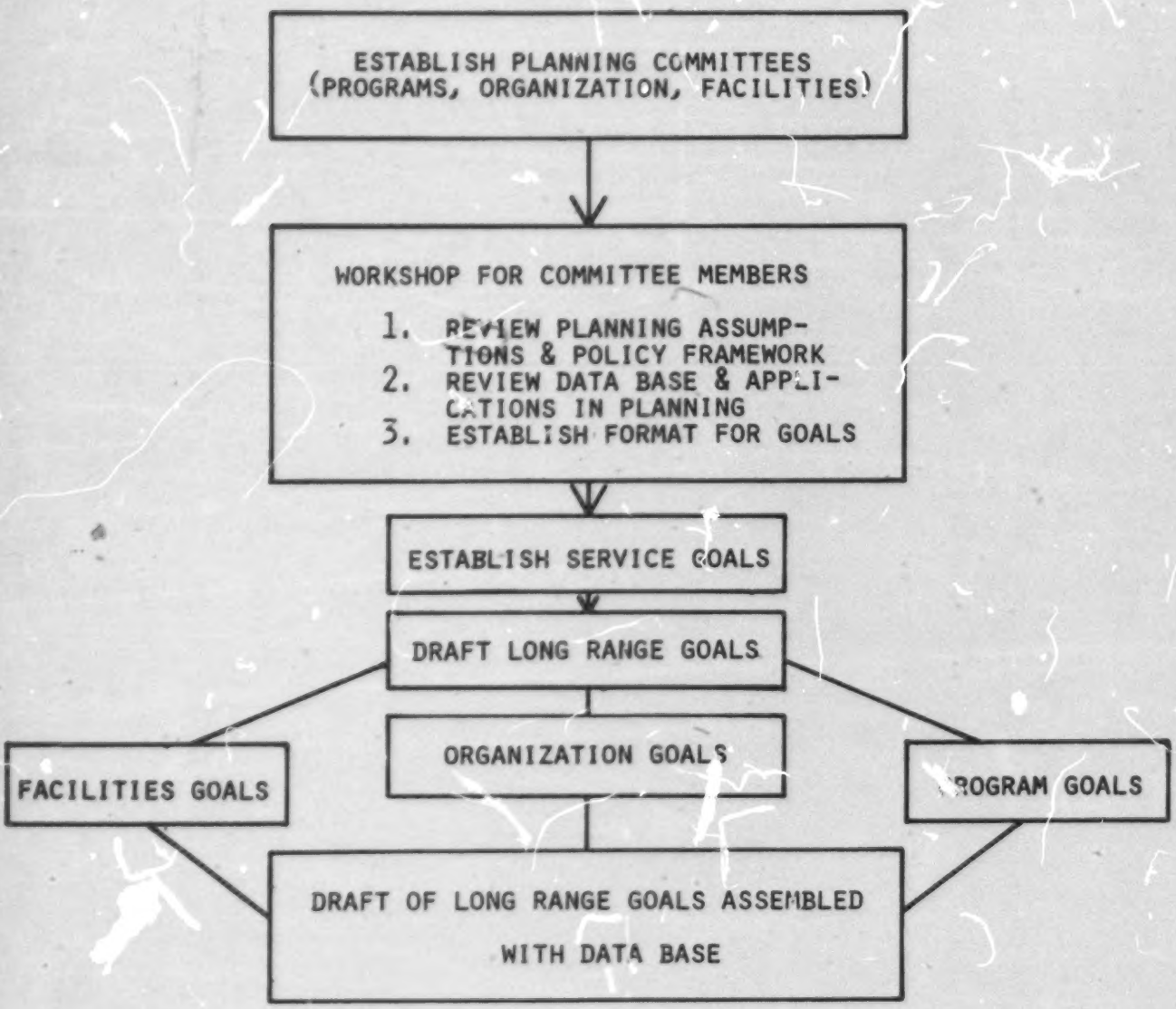
The remaining elements in the planning data base are the long range projections of enrollment and resources (financial, personnel, facilities). To some extent these projections may represent goals in themselves, although typically the process is a rather technical one that is determined in large part by state coordinating agencies and state budgeting agencies. These technical projections are critical data for the goal setting process. However, technical projections should not be permitted to inhibit the goal setting process any more than necessary.

Long Range Goals

The long range goals make up the core of the master plan. They should answer the question of where the college wants to be -- in several key areas of operation -- in five to ten years. The goals should stem from the college's mission statement and from the planning data base previously developed. The goals should be a statement of the intended results of the college's activities

Figure 4

LONG RANGE GOALS


ESTABLISH PLANNING COMMITTEES (PROGRAMS, ORGANIZATION, FACILITIES)
WORKSHOP FOR COMMITTEE MEMBERS
1. REVIEW PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS & POLICY FRAMEWORK
2. REVIEW DATA BASE & APPLICATIONS IN PLANNING
3. ESTABLISH FORMAT FOR GOALS
ESTABLISH SERVICE GOALS
DRAFT LONG RANGE GOALS
FACILITIES GOALS
ORGANIZATION GOALS
PROGRAM GOALS
DRAFT OF LONG RANGE GOALS ASSEMBLED WITH DATA BASE

over the next ten years and they should be specific enough in their measurability that they indicate the degree and direction of change from the present.

Unlike the development of the data base, which requires the technical expertise of a staff specialist in research and planning, drafting the long range goals requires broad participation by representatives from all segments of the college community. However, because long range planning is an arduous and time-consuming process, that participation needs to be highly structured and carefully coordinated.

While broad participation enhances the legitimacy of the plan, it also co-opts the various constituencies of the college into the planning process. It is equally important that top management be actively and directly involved in the goal drafting process. Their participation assures the critical support of the goals when it comes time to implement the plan. Top management needs to sit down with representatives from all segments of the college community and decide on mutually agreeable goals. It must be recognized and accepted by all participants that when agreement cannot be reached, the final authority to set goals rests with top management.

One approach to structuring this participation, although by no means the only one, is to establish planning committees, chaired by top management, and composed of representatives from the faculty, students, and support staff. These committees should be organized in terms of the different types of long range goals -- programs, facilities, and organization. These committees need to be small enough to be working units but large enough to be representative. Generally, five to seven members are recommended.

Once the institution is committed to broad participation in the planning process, it will be necessary for the planning staff to conduct a workshop for all participants to review the legal basis for the planning, the planning strategy, and the planning data base. Also, the planning staff will need to establish a consistent format for the long range goals.

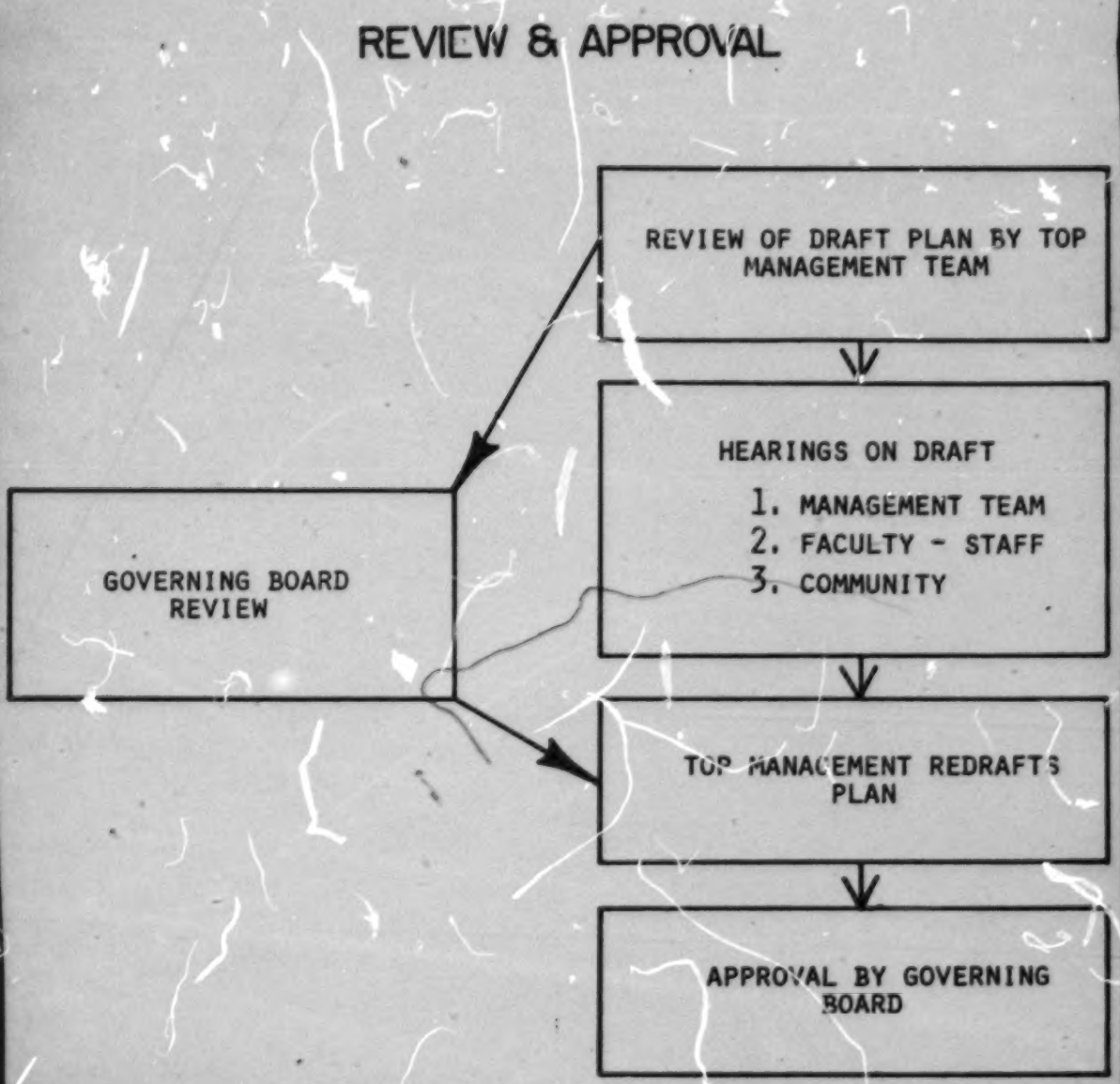
The planning staff will need to be available to all of the committees to interpret and analyze data in the data base as well as to provide additional data at the request of the committees. The work of the committees will need to be closely coordinated since the goals of one area frequently depend on those of another. For this reason, it is important to establish the basic service targets for the college first, and then to draft separately the goals for programs, facilities, and organization. It may be that some institutions would find it helpful to deal with program goals first and then to develop facility and organization goals since the latter typically depend on the former.

Once the long range goals have been drafted, they will need to be assembled with the data base. This constitutes the working draft of the master plan and it will serve as the basic talking point in the review and approval process.

Review and Approval

It is important to use this phase to broaden the participation in the planning process. Segments of the college community which may not have been represented in the planning committees should now be given an opportunity to review the plan. The objective should be to give everyone who wishes an opportunity to review and comment on the plan.

Figure 5


REVIEW & APPROVAL
REVIEW OF DRAFT PLAN BY TOP MANAGEMENT TEAM
HEARINGS ON DRAFT
1. MANAGEMENT TEAM
2. FACULTY - STAFF
3. COMMUNITY
GOVERNING BOARD REVIEW
TOP MANAGEMENT REDRAFTS PLAN
APPROVAL BY GOVERNING BOARD

Involvement by the governing board final to formal approval is critical. Board members will generally have a great deal to contribute. In any event, any major concerns of the board should be noted and dealt with before the plan is presented for approval. This involvement could take the form of asking members of the board to participate on the planning committees. Another approach would be to hold a working session with the board once the draft plan has been developed, but before the review and approval process has started. It is important, however, that top management be prepared to defend the draft once it goes to the board. Internal differences should be resolved before the process begins.

Three constituencies of the college need to review the draft plan and have an opportunity to propose additions or changes: the management team, the faculty and staff, and the community at large. A somewhat structured, although open, approach to this review process is the hearing. It allows all interested parties to express their views, and provides an opportunity for top management and the planning staff to answer any questions that might be raised. The hearing process is time-consuming, but the broadened participation will produce dividends. Many of the comments will deal with issues which have been overlooked, and the process as a whole will build support for the plan. Participation, particularly by members of the community, will not automatically result from the hearings unless the college actively encourages participation. This means the college staff will need to publicize the hearing, provide copies of the draft plan, and schedule the hearings at the convenience of those who may wish to come. The college should consider broad coverage by the media, particularly the local newspapers, if the information is to get out to the public. Also,

it is advisable to invite representatives from community agencies, volunteer action groups, local government, and civic and business groups.

Comments received at the hearings should be carefully noted. Once the hearings are complete, top management will need to carefully review the plan in light of those comments and to agree on a final plan to submit to the governing board for approval.

III. EVALUATION

Implementation of the planning procedure outlined in this paper yielded many dividends for the college. Most important was the fact that broad segments of the college community were informed about the long range goals of the college and to varying degrees identified with those goals. Beyond that, management, faculty and staff became committed to planning, if not to this particular plan, and increasingly insisted that day-to-day decisions be consistent with long range plans.

Moreover, the extensive interaction between the various segments of the college community in the planning process created a better understanding of each segment's needs and demonstrated to many the governance restraints which circumscribe college planning. Also, for the first time all planning activities at the college -- program planning, facilities planning, organizational development, and budgetary planning -- were brought together. Similarly, long range planning and management were integrated under one goal-oriented framework.

These dividends were not without their costs. The process was exceedingly time-consuming and at times tedious. Extensive distributions of working papers and master plan drafts were required. Faculty time devoted to the project (which was substantial) had to be compensated. A good deal of staff support was required to deliver the necessary services to the participants and otherwise coordinate the process. Finally, the review process, on occasions, was tedious, especially when many of the same issues were raised again and again or when few individuals seemed interested in participating.

The participants also expressed some concerns which are not so much a criticism of the procedure as they are of the management of the process.

There was widespread feeling that rather than focus on what ought-to-be in setting long range goals, the college should concern itself with what is practical, or what is likely. While this may be an appealing philosophy to some, it can result in some rather short-sighted planning.

Also, many committee members were apparently not prepared to accept substantial changes in the goals drafted by their committees. There was some reluctance to accept the fact that agreement on goals is not always possible and that top management may have to resolve any differences. Another concern was that no real mechanism existed to interrelate committee activities at the goal-drafting stage. The committees on organization and facilities felt strongly that the educational program goals should be drafted before they could begin their work. This may be the best way to deal with the problem except that the change would significantly lengthen the process.

The procedure had a significant impact on the Office of Institutional Research. A great deal of data was required beyond that normally developed in support of a master plan. The community survey, job market survey, goal inventory, and program audit were major research efforts in and of themselves. The burden on the institutional research office was substantial.

Beyond the data needs in the procedure, the Office of Institutional Research had to provide extensive staff assistance to the committees as well as manage the review and approval process. Frequently, committee members requested data in different formats, or they asked the Office to do additional analysis or provide additional interpretations.

In general, the Office of Institutional Research's role in planning and management was strengthened in the process. Staff members became accustomed to seek out data in support of day-to-day decisions as well as long range planning. However, the demands on the Office had to be effectively managed. It was necessary to carefully evaluate the resources available to the Office and design a research strategy commensurate with those resources. Not all of the research that should have been done in support of the master plan was accomplished within the planning cycle. Since the college regards long range planning as a continuous process, our goals will be revised as the research is completed and as new data otherwise becomes available.

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